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ABSTRACT

As communication/English curricula pass from a period of great diversity to one of greater centrality, educators need to find a more reasoned direction to guide curricular decision making. Many of the current reports on the state of education refer to the importance of oral communication skills, but such skills have not received their rightful status at the high school level. Speech is considered a minor part of the language arts rather than a distinct or separate unit. Some college admissions standards do not include certain oral communications courses. Fortunately, many local boards of education believe oral communication belongs among the curricula, despite economic difficulties. To enhance the role of speech in the schools, speech and English faculty can (1) continue to work with sequencing the oral communication skills and with precise measurements; (2) emphasize those skills that help make speech communication vital for students' future; (3) work to relate the skills in the areas of speech, English, and language arts directly to developing curricula; and (4) teach with excellence. (HTH)

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The Broader Educational Community Looks at Communication Education: What are the Needs? How Can We Meet Them?

The Perspective of a High School Director of Instruction-English

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Near the beginning of this decade, Joseph O. Milner wrote, "...curriculum developers(and implementers) will be deciding among English, language arts and communication as the unifying force of the field. We have moved steadily toward the language arts concept in recent years-in many instances toward the very broad view that 'English' should include everything from techno-literacy to body language. This extreme breadth may, in fact, stimulate a radical narrowing to what parents and legislators themselves experienced in the classic English classroom." (Phi Delta Kappan, February 1981, p.416) Indeed it would seem that these words of Dr. Milner are prophetic. We have come through a period of great diversity; we are entering one of greater centrality. As we approach the second half of the eighties, I would encourage us to find a more reasoned direction than that which a previous generation experienced in the "classic English classroom" to guide our curricular decisionmaking.

We are in the midst of a barrage of reports on education. Many of them refer to the import of oral communication skills. The College Board publication, Academic Preparation for College, specifies six different oral communication skills among the English competencies college entrants need:

CS 204 710

"-The ability to engage in discussion as both speaker and listener-interpreting, analyzing, and summarizing.

-The ability to contribute to classroom discussions in a way that is readily understood by listeners-that is, succinct and to the point.

-The ability to present an opinion persuasively.

-The ability to recognize the intention of a speaker and to be aware of the techniques a speaker is using to affect an audience.

-The ability to recognize and take notes on important points in lectures and discussions.

-The ability to question inconsistency in logic and to separate fact from opinion."

The 1983 Education Commission of the States and its Task Force on Education for Economic Growth, included speaking and listening competencies among the basic skills they enumerated. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1983, says that students must develop strong skills in oral English. Boyer's High School:A Report on Secondary Education in America, lists speech as one-half unit of the 5 units in language within a proposed core of common learning. Another report, Nation at Risk recommends four years of English at the high school level. Within the recommended English in that report is "The teaching of English in high school should equip graduates to:...(c)listen effectively and discuss ideas intelligently...." The 20-member panel on Secondary School Education for the Changing Workplace lists "command of the English language" as the most basic skill. In addition, reasoning and problem solving, reading, writing, oral communication, and interpersonal relationships are among the ten areas of competence enumerated. Adler lists speaking and listening among the development of intellectual skills in The Paideia Proposal:A Curriculum Manifesto. Additionally, in a 1982 document Essentials of English the NCTE itemizes a number of objectives we, in speech, claim:

"Speaking

Students should learn
-to speak clearly and expressively about their ideas and concerns
-to adapt words and strategies according to varying situations and audiences, from one-to-one conversations to formal large-group settings
-to participate productively and harmoniously in both small and large groups
-to present arguments in orderly and convincing ways
-to interpret and assess various kinds of communication, including intonation, pause, gesture, and body language that accompany speaking

Listening

Students should
-learn that listening with understanding depends on determining a speaker's purpose
-learn to attend to detail and relate it to the overall purpose of the communication
-learn to evaluate the messages and effects of mass communication"

Finally, Leon Botstein, in "Nine Proposals to Improve Schools"(NYT Magazine June 5,1983), suggests "reading aloud" and studying how arguments are put together as essential curricular foci in a reordered English curriculum.

Yet, oral communication has not received its rightful status among disciplines at the high school level. Oral communication skills are frequently overlooked. Speech is considered a minor part of the language arts rather than a distinct unit or a separate one of the arts. While the status of the discipline has been elevated through the efforts of professionals at all levels, other than adoption of certification requirementsfor speech teachers, little substantive progress has been made. A number of schools still offer speech as one six-week unit in a high school English classroom. Few, if any, of the state reforms initiated as a result of the reports have helped the speech education area. One of the new laws in Illinois actually hinders the position of

speech courses. I call the act the Mandated Miscellany Law. What the law does is to require one year of foreign language, art, music or vocational training for every student. The vocational training does not include acting or broadcasting courses. During admissions procedures, some of our H-F high school students were even penalized for having taken speech classes instead of the more "English" literature or grammar selections. Through a survey we learned that college admissions officers do monitor the transcripts very carefully; some schools do not count certain oral communication courses toward the fulfillment of the standards applied to incoming freshmen. Broadcasting, film, debate, and acting are among the courses which are not accepted. The identity crisis we face as speech professionals extends to our own educational settings. We have colleagues who question the relative value of our area. "After all it is more difficult to analyze a literary work than to prepare a first affirmative rebuttal...and plays are meant to be read and studied; not performed."

Fortunately, many of the local boards of education believe that we ought to have oral communication among our curricular offerings. However, even some of the most committed local boards have had to cancel speech programs for economic reasons. What can we do to enhance the role of speech in the schools? We can continue to work with sequencing the oral communication skills and with precise forms of measurement. We can emphasize those skills which help make the speech communication vital in tomorrow's world. We can work to relate the skills in our respective areas directly to developing curricula. And, we can

teach well. I have little doubt that many of us are here because of the inspiration and encouragement we received from our own speech teachers and coaches along the way. Our own teaching can bring others. In sum, we should capitalize on the attention to curriculum which accompanies these reports and thereby insure responsible communication education. We need to be forward-looking and constructive with our energy.

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